

## **Good Reading for the Million: The ‘Paperback Revolution’ and the Co-Production of Academic Knowledge in Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Britain and America\***

In 1952, at a time when his own future bestseller *The Lonely Crowd* was not yet in paperback, the American sociologist David Riesman reported to the readers of the *Antioch Review* on a new cultural phenomenon that might have before that date escaped their notice. A friend of his in the publishing industry had told him that in an Ohio Valley steel town, population 75,000, which lacked a single bookstore and about which the department store buyer insisted ‘[p]eople here don’t read; they just look at television or go to the taverns’, nevertheless 750,000 paperback books a year were sold in restaurants, newsstands and drugstores, ‘many of them in the Mentor line of modern classics’. ‘I wish we had some knowledge and understanding of what these citizens made out of all they read’, Riesman continued, ‘the Faulkner novels, the Conant *On Understanding Science*, the Ruth Benedict *Patterns of Culture*, along with the Mickey Spillane and other mixtures of sadism with sex. But studies of this kind in the field of leisure have not yet been made, as far as I know.’<sup>1</sup>

As far as I know, they still have not been made. Of the paperback revolution in general, which brought books to new readerships around the world from the mid-1930s when Penguin pioneered the mass-market paperback in Britain, we know a fair amount, and literary scholars have demonstrated amply how a taste for classic and modernist fiction like the Faulkner novels was aroused ‘along with the Mickey Spillane’.<sup>2</sup> But Riesman’s curiosity

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<sup>1</sup> David Riesman, ‘Some Observations on Changes in Leisure Attitudes’ (1952), repr. in *Selected Essays from Individualism Reconsidered* (Garden City, N.Y., 1955), 142.

<sup>2</sup> The best study of the paperback revolution is Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America* (Boston, 1984), on the US; no comparable study exists for the UK. Two excellent books that focus on

about the even more incongruous taste for the serious non-fiction purveyed by the Mentor line – as we will see, a direct spin-off of Penguin’s Pelican imprint – has not been satisfied, although a rising tide of single-issue or single-title studies suggests that we are if anything now more curious about it.<sup>3</sup>

In this article I seek to provide a basic knowledge and understanding of the mass audiences for serious non-fiction paperbacks built up in the mid-twentieth century. Apart from satisfying Riesman’s (and our) curiosity, such an enquiry can help to address broader questions about the diffusion of expert knowledges to democratic citizenries that have become staples in the dissection of what the Foucauldians call ‘governmentality’ – the ways in which ‘the values and ethics of democratic society’ become aligned with ‘the rationales and techniques of power’, as Nikolaus Rose has put it.<sup>4</sup> In the Foucauldian view of modernity, knowledge and power are completely inter-penetrated; thus the mere transmission of knowledge, especially if yoked to internalized acknowledgement of the hegemony of expertise, is constitutive of (and not merely supportive of) power relations. A milder, post-Foucauldian revision of this view, popular amongst historians of science for some time now, takes a more benign or at least agnostic view of power, and considers knowledge to be not so much transmitted as ‘co-produced’ with its consumers.<sup>5</sup> So far, however, this view has appeared easier to propound in theory than to demonstrate in

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the literary consequences of the paperback revolution are Thomas L. Bonn, *Heavy Traffic and High Culture: New American Library as Literary Gatekeeper in the Paperback Revolution* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Ill., 1989) and Paula Rabinowitz, *American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street* (Princeton, 2014); again, no comparable study exists for the UK.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Ben Mercer, ‘The Paperback Revolution: Mass-Circulation Books and the Cultural Origins of 1968 in Western Europe’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, lxii (2011); Dean Blackburn, ‘Penguin Books and the “Marketplace for Ideas”’, in Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane (eds.), *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester, 2013); Gavin Miller, ‘Psychiatric Penguins: Writing on Psychiatry for Penguin Books, c. 1950-c. 1980’, *History of the Human Sciences*, xxviii (2015). Studies of particularly influential single books are now also more likely to consider their paperbacks and their circulation, though see below nn. for the persisting tendency to deploy only the lower-circulation hardcover edition.

<sup>4</sup> Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, 2nd edn (London, 1999), 1-10.

<sup>5</sup> For influential statements of this view see Roger Cooter and Stephen Pumfrey, ‘Separate Spheres and Public Places: Reflections on the History of Science Popularization and Science in Popular Culture’, *History of Science*, xxxii (1994) and James A. Secord, ‘Knowledge in Transit’, *Isis*, xcv (2004).

practice.<sup>6</sup> While it is sensible to hold that knowledge production rarely follows a straightforward ‘diffusionist’ model, in which expert knowledges are disseminated downwards intact, it is harder to show how knowledge is received, reprocessed and fed back such that knowledge can be shown to have been ‘co-produced’ in multiple nodes.<sup>7</sup> A close study of the non-fiction paperback may shed some light on this complex process by specifying more closely the conditions of production and distribution, and the degree of co-production, of a prime vehicle for knowledge, at its peak in a period which even advocates of co-production tend to see as the heyday of the downward diffusion of expertise.<sup>8</sup>

## I

The paperback book offers special opportunities and challenges to the study of expertise and its publics. With its depth of content, demands upon attention and relative permanence, it packed a punch that more ephemeral (though persistent) mass media such as radio, cinema and television lacked. While less ubiquitous in modern life than law and national symbolism, its direct address to subjectivity made it one of the more effective ‘technologies of the self’ in an age when those technologies were manifestly multiplying. It entrained many actors and operated on many levels. Both production and consumption chains were highly ramified – authors, publishers, censors, wholesalers, retailers, educators, critics, and, pre-eminently, readers could all use the paperback to get a grip on the ‘selves’ in construction around them. The product was also highly ramified. Pulp fiction was at first the predominant form, much decried then by moralists and educators, and subsequently by critics of the capitalist marketplace. As already noted, literary critics have threshed out of the mass

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., repetitions of the Cooter and Pumfrey plea over 20 years later: Katherine Pandora, ‘Popular Science in National and Transnational Perspective: Suggestions from the American Context’, *Isis* 100 (2009), 346-58; Andreas W. Daum, ‘Varieties of Popular Science and the Transformations of Public Knowledge: Some Historical Reflections’, *Isis*, c (2009).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the feedback process at work in different ways in the human sciences in this mid-twentieth century period, see Joel Isaac, ‘Tangled Loops: Theory, History, and the Human Sciences in Modern America’, *Modern Intellectual History*, vi (2009), esp. 415-22.

<sup>8</sup> Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent, ‘A Historical Perspective on Science and Its “Others”’, *Isis*, c (2009).

of pulp a burgeoning taste for classic and contemporary fiction. Moving closer to expertise proper, paperbacks were the principal vehicle (alongside magazines) for expert management of daily life through self-help and advice manuals on topics ranging from ‘winning friends and influencing people’ to ‘baby care’, sexuality, marriage, career, health and nutrition. The bestselling non-fiction paperbacks in postwar America were Dr. Spock’s *Baby and Child Care*, well ahead of the pack with 18.5 million copies sold between 1940 and 1965, and Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, a distant second at 5 million.<sup>9</sup>

But as Riesman understood already in 1952, coming up behind such advice manuals was a much more sophisticated body of expertise, drawing largely on academic writing and research, and spanning the full range of modern academic subjects, from the traditional humanities (classics, history, philosophy) to the rising social sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology) and the natural sciences (physics, physiology, mathematics). Unlikely as it sounds, bestsellers in these categories also reached a mass audience in the postwar decades – both Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture*, which Riesman noticed, and his own book *The Lonely Crowd*, paperbacked in 1953, had sold over 1 million copies by 1970. This kind of book – more abstract and conceptual, less directly targeted at the individual’s subjectivity, and also less aggressively marketed – represented, I will argue, a different use of expertise. While its producers had ‘missionary’ aspirations of their own, consumers had more say in choosing the type of expertise that suited them and more latitude in the uses they made of it. An anatomy of the academic mass-market paperback can therefore tell us something new about ‘technologies of the self’ that takes us well beyond the usual band of experts and bureaucrats and ideologies of ‘social control’.

The mass-market paperback was a global phenomenon, but its impact was earliest and most intense in the Anglophone world. I will focus therefore on the pioneer, Pelican Books,

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<sup>9</sup> Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 282. The only other non-fiction books in this league were dictionaries.

published by Penguin in the United Kingdom (though also exported all over the world, notably to the Commonwealth), and Mentor Books, published by New American Library in the United States, the two acknowledged market leaders in this field at least until the early 1960s. In what follows I will narrate the rise of Pelicans and Mentors, consider who were their readers, assess what they read, and finally attempt some answers to Riesman's query about what they made of what they read – obviously the hardest part of all – and how their choices fed back into the process of knowledge production by inflecting what was on offer.

The origin-tale of Penguin is reasonably well-known.<sup>10</sup> The founder was Allen Lane, a distant connection of the John Lane publishing family. By his own admission, he did not start Penguin with a burning social or political mission; he was principally concerned to tilt against the snobberies of the book trade and at the same time make some money, by selling cheap, well-designed paperback editions of middlebrow novels and biographies to an under-served provincial and suburban audience. There had been such experiments before – notably in Germany, where Tauschnitz and Albatross books had aimed at British travelers on the Continent – but Lane caught the *Zeitgeist* as no-one else had. His books were handsome, convenient, affordable, and, as they proved popular, quickly became ubiquitous, breaking out of the bookshops into Woolworth's chain stores, railway bookstalls, newsagents and tobacconists.<sup>11</sup> Partly under this impetus, by 1940 50% more working-class readers were in the habit of buying books than borrowed them from libraries.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The best accounts are Nicholas Joicey, 'The Intellectual, Political and Cultural Significance of Penguin Books, 1935 - c. 1956' (University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis 1995); Steve Hare (ed.), *Penguin Portrait: Allen Lane and the Penguin Editors 1935-1970* (Harmondsworth, 1995); and Jeremy Lewis, *Penguin Special: The Life and Times of Allen Lane* (London, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> George Scott, Margaret Lane and Walter Allen, interviews with Allen Lane, 1960; Hazel Mansell, 'Conversations with Allen Lane', Session 1, 1968: University of Bristol, Special Collections, Penguin Archive, DM1843/17, DM1294/14/1/23.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Rose, 'Modernity and Print I: Britain 1890-1970', in Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (eds.), *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Oxford, 2007), 347-8. Library usage grew after the war, slowly at first, more rapidly in the 1960s, but principally among a more middle-class constituency, and apparently losing ground amongst working-class readers, in part because of paperbacks. Alistair Black, 'False Optimism: Modernity, Class, and the Public Library in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s', *Libraries and Culture*, xxxviii

By then Allen Lane was seeking something more than mere commercial success. In the depths of the Slump, Lane like many sensitive, comfortably-off young men of the time did have a mild social conscience, and he was quickly swept up into a giddy whirl of earnest social reformers and adult-educators – old Fabians like Shaw and Wells, whose titles proved instant hits for Penguin, the Indian nationalist Krishna Menon, the social historian Lance Beales, and most importantly Billy Williams, son of a Welsh carpenter and a pillar of the adult-education movement. Lane, who like most middle-class boys had left school at 16, came to see something of what he had missed, and to view the paperback as a portable evening-class and not only as an entertainment. And in the spirit of the '30s – of the Workers' Educational Association, the Left Book Club and the Popular Front – he married this educational impulse to a leftish stance, going so far as to contribute an article entitled 'Books for the Million' to the magazine *Left Review* in May 1938, which portrayed the Penguin paperback as a contribution to the people's control of their own destiny.<sup>13</sup>

Lane's principal vehicle for this educational and political mission was Pelican Books, the serious non-fiction line added to Penguin in 1937. Pelican only ever accounted for a minority of Penguin sales – 10% in wartime, though a growing proportion thereafter; this amounted to nearly 2m copies a year in wartime for a population of 50m, and similar or higher levels thereafter.<sup>14</sup> It was Pelican to which Lane was referring in *Left Review* when he attributed political significance to his enterprise – it was Pelican that gave 'access to contemporary thought and to a reasonable body of scientific knowledge' to put ever growing numbers of people 'in a position to control our future in the light of our knowledge of the

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(2003), 201-13; Thomas Kelly, *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845-1975*, 2nd ed. (London, 1977), 343, 352, 380, 434-5.

<sup>13</sup> Allen Lane, 'Books for the Million', *Left Review* (May 1938), 968.

<sup>14</sup> Joicey, 'Penguin Books', 127. Intensive wartime reading levels – 17m Penguins, including 1.7m Pelicans, were sold in 1941 – were not reached again until the 1960s, but as Pelicans grew as a proportion of the total it is probable that Pelican sales maintained or exceeded wartime levels by the late 1950s. By 1970, by which time it had many rivals for this market, Penguin was selling 27m copies p.a., much now in exports, and 80% from its backlist, where Pelican was strongest. Antony Thorncroft, 'Tough days among paperbacks', *Financial Times*, 8 May 1970.

past.<sup>15</sup> Billy Williams helped Lane move beyond his middle-class base to wider strata of self-improving working men, and to scout out the kinds of serious non-fiction that might appeal to and empower this audience – in the first instance, history, sociology, politics and economics, but increasingly also science, art, and later an ever-widening set of academic disciplines. While Lane and Williams had their own educational and political motives – and naturally gravitated at first to Fabian socialism, to the historical, literary and economic interests of the adult-education movement, and to the political issues of the day (featured also in the famous series of Penguin Specials from 1938) – both their commercial interests and their open-mindedness about their audience (really an ignorance that they shared with everyone, who had discounted even the possibility of a mass market for such fare) favoured an experimental approach. Any topic, so long as it met their minimum standards of decency and seriousness, was grist to their mill. Titles were selected informally and on the basis both of past sales and new enthusiasms, the enthusiasms not only of Lane and Williams, but also of two loose cannons Lane had recruited early on – Alan Glover, an eccentric auto-didact, known for the tattoo-removal scars that covered his face and his encyclopedic range of interests from Freud to Buddhism, and Eunice Frost, the talent scout sent out to ‘[keep] the house policy abreast with contemporary thought’.<sup>16</sup>

Even at the start, commentators were astonished by the range and altitude of the titles that could (it turned out) be sold in print-runs of 50,000 or more – not just Shaw and Wells, or current affairs, but the likes of Tawney’s *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Elie Halevy’s *History of the English People* (sold in 7 parts), or Freud’s *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. ‘These are all books which...have helped to make the intellectual history of this century’, marveled the *Spectator*, and their availability for ‘the price of a cheap cinema

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<sup>15</sup> Lane, ‘Books for the Million’, 968.

<sup>16</sup> On Glover, see Hare (ed.), *Penguin Portrait*, 128-32; on Frost, ‘A Report on Penguin World’, Mass-Observation Report 2545 (Dec. 1947), 288, and Eunice Frost, ‘How I became a literary midwife’, 19 May 1993: Penguin Archive, DM1843/17.

seat or a packet of cigarettes' was 'a fact of enormous importance in the struggle to overcome economic restrictions to knowledge...one more indication of the hunger for information, for fact, for explanation, which exists unsatisfied at the present time.' 'When the corner tobacconist is selling' such books, the *Times* concluded, 'it is a fair assumption that very large strata of purchasers are being tapped.'<sup>17</sup>

Even wider strata of potential purchasers beckoned temptingly across the Atlantic, where in the U.S., with three times the population but half the number of bookstores, there appeared to be a huge unexploited mass market. Starting with Pocket Books in 1939, a few paperback houses had opened in New York and during the war began to build a mass market mostly for pulp fiction by distributing through magazine wholesalers to a bewildering variety of retail newsstands, drugstores, smoke shops, and variety stores. Lane felt certain that there were opportunities here for his quality lines as well. After a few abortive attempts to start up an American operation – Lane's first representatives in New York insisted that they could only sell pulp through the retail outlets – he finally found two true believers like himself and Williams, Kurt Enoch (a founder of the original German Albatross Books, now providentially marooned in the States as an under-employed refugee) and Victor Weybright (a progressive publisher who had run the U.S. propaganda office in London during the war). Weybright, who took editorial charge, and Enoch, who handled the business, set up an operation that was very much a mirror-image of Penguin, with its own Billy Williams-figure – E.C. Lindeman, a Columbia philosopher and adult educator<sup>18</sup> – and its own equivalent of the talent-spotting Eunice Frost, Arabel Porter. The first American Pelicans appeared in January 1946.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> 'Books and the Public', *Spectator*, 22 Jul. 1938; Margaret Cole, 'Books for the Multitude – II, III', *Listener*, 29 Dec. 1937, 5 Jan. 1938; 'An Important Market', *Times*, 28 Sep. 1937. Indeed, sales of such books surprised Lane himself: Allen Lane, 'Penguins and Pelicans', *Penrose Annual*, xl (1938), 44.

<sup>18</sup> On Lindeman, and the particular kind of adult education that he identified with, very much like Williams, see Joseph F. Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties* (Stanford, 1994), 341-51.

<sup>19</sup> On the origins of Penguin Books Inc., see Kurt Enoch, 'Memo regarding Kurt Enoch/Allen Lane relationship 1937-1947', 17 Jun. 1971: Penguin Archive, DM1294/14/1/15; Victor Weybright, *The Making of a Publisher: A Life in the 20th Century Book Revolution* (London, 1968), ch. 7; Hare (ed.), *Penguin Portraits*, 148-53.



For a time the U.S. and U.K. operations appeared to run in tandem. In both countries Pelicans formed a substantial and surprising proportion of total sales. They were a mix of reprints of classics, recent academic works that had only appeared in hardcover, and specially commissioned works – increasingly the latter as Lane, Williams and Weybright learned what sold and could guide authors to providing suitable copy on subjects they wanted to try out. U.S. Pelican borrowed titles from U.K. Pelican – Shaw, Wells, Tawney, Julian Huxley, the physicist James Jeans and the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead all sold well in both countries – and bought rights for equivalent titles tailored to the U.S. market – Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture*, Walter Lippmann’s *Public Opinion*, and, as an equivalent to Jeans, the physicist George Gamow.<sup>20</sup> As Williams wrote to Weybright, they shared a ‘common belief’ in publishing as ‘a vocation as well as a trade’, the peculiar synergy between ‘commerce’ and ‘conscience’ being responsible for their exceptional success in both: ‘The great advantage which a man like you has over other crusaders is that he works in plain clothes and is not always parading his Holy Cross. No one, to look at Allen and you and me would suspect us of having good intentions, and that is the real reason why our intentions work out!’<sup>21</sup>

Despite this common cause, two differences quickly intervened that led to a parting of the ways. Both derived from the special challenges of selling books in America. While Americans had much higher levels of formal education than the British, they did not read many books, even when in college, and once out of college poor distribution meant that they had few opportunities to buy books even if they wished. There were only something like 1200 bookshops in the entire country, heavily concentrated in major metropolitan areas – a half of all bookshops were located in five states (New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts,

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<sup>20</sup> ‘About Pelicans’, n.d. (1946); ‘A Note About Penguin Books, Inc. and Its Plans for the Future’, n.d. (1946): New York University, Fales Library and Special Collections, New American Library Archive, 35/519.

<sup>21</sup> W.E. Williams to Victor Weybright, 6 Mar. 1946: Penguin Archive, DM1294/3/2.

Illinois and California), and 85% of counties across the country had no recognized outlet for books at all.<sup>22</sup> Mail-order book clubs, like the Book-of-the-Month Club, founded in 1926, had done something to rectify this, but had only succeeded in doubling the volume of book sales, mostly to highly-educated people, buying the same kind of books as were bought in shops.<sup>23</sup> Pocket Books' solution, as we have seen, was to peddle books through wholesalers to magazine and newspaper outlets, of which there were up to 100,000 nationwide, reaching even the smallest communities. Weybright readily adopted this solution, but to make it work he felt he had to adopt two practices that were unacceptable to Lane.

First, he needed some massive sellers to get the wholesalers to take his books in the first place – books that were guaranteed to sell anywhere in sufficient quantities to make it worth their while. So Weybright was prepared to lead his line with pulps and near-pulps – in addition to Dr. Spock, Pocket Books had used Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason detective stories for this purpose, and Weybright bought the rights to Mickey Spillane's hard-boiled private eye stories and Erskine Caldwell's sexed-up Southern Gothic tales. The pulp fiction did not affect the selection and sale of the more serious lines – nor did they cross-subsidize, all of Weybright's books aimed to make a profit – but they were needed to get access to the wholesalers, something which Lane could not and did not accept. He would rather not publish at all in the United States if it meant selling what he considered pornography.

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<sup>22</sup> These figures derive from a 1931 survey, but similar figures were reported in the 1950s: O.H. Cheney, *Economic Survey of the Book Industry 1930-1931* (New York, 1931), 233-50; William Miller, *The Book Industry* (New York, 1949), 89; Bonn, *Heavy Traffic*, 176; Raymond Walters Jr., 'There's Something for Everybody', *New York Times Book Review*, 17 Jan. 1960, 32-3; Jacob M. Price (ed.), *Reading for Life: Developing the College Student's Lifetime Reading Interest* (Ann Arbor, 1959), 188-9, 220; and cf. the somewhat more optimistic count in Laura J. Miller, 'Selling the Product', in David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin and Michael Schudson (eds.), *The Enduring Book: Print Culture in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill NC, 2009), 92-3. Much depends on what is counted as a 'bookshop'.

<sup>23</sup> Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill NC, 1992), esp. ch. 3, Janice A. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997); Harold K. Guinzburg, 'The Role of the Campus Bookstore and Campus Media of Communication', in Price (ed.), *Reading for Life*, 184-8.

Second, in order to sell his serious lines through the retail outlets, Weybright went in for rather more aggressive marketing than Lane would tolerate, including colour covers (not as lurid as his pulp covers, but able to sit comfortably alongside them) and salesmanship on the jacket copy to entice reluctant or unsophisticated readers to crack the spine. Again, this packaging hardly affected the content of the books – Weybright continued to print the same kind of material as Penguin (indeed often the same titles) – but Lane forbade it; neither colour nor even illustration became common on Penguins until the 1960s, and the jacket copy remained austere and descriptive. These irreconcilable differences were recognized quickly on both sides, by 1948 Lane had agreed to sell his interest to Enoch and Weybright, and the U.S. operation was relaunched in that year as New American Library, with its Penguin lines rebranded as Signet Books and its Pelicans as Mentor Books.<sup>24</sup>

Despite these differences, Pelican and Mentor remained embarked on similar missions through the early 1960s at least, and remained the dominant purveyors in their respective markets of serious non-fiction in mass-market paperback form.<sup>25</sup> Weybright even adopted for NAL a slogan he borrowed from Lane (slightly Americanized in diction), ‘Good Reading for the Millions’. They had no real rivals until Doubleday launched Anchor Books in the United States in 1953, followed by Knopf’s Vintage Books and a wave of similar quality-paperback imprints from other hardback houses. Even these so-called ‘egghead paperbacks’ were not quite in the Pelican and Mentor mould, being higher-priced and more clearly targeted at college and graduate markets.<sup>26</sup> Although the egghead imprints had some

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<sup>24</sup> Weybright, *Making of a Publisher*, 179-200, gives a full, though not impartial account of their differences; see also Kurt Enoch, ‘Memo regarding Kurt Enoch/Allen Lane relationship 1937-1947’, 17 Jun. 1971: Penguin Archive, DM1294/14/1/15.

<sup>25</sup> Mentor held an ‘acknowledged monopoly on academic nonfiction in the mass market’ until about 1960: Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 269-71; Pelican was still seen as a near-monopolist of this sector as late as 1967: *Management Today*, Aug. 1967.

<sup>26</sup> Anchor books sold for 65c-\$1.25 with initial print runs of 20-37,000, skewed much further to bookshops than Mentor: Frank L. Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America* (New York, 1958), 87, 182; Jason Epstein, *Book Business: Publishing Past Present and Future* (New York, 2002), 64; Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 208-9. Mentor sold in this period for 35-50c with initial print runs of over 50,000, and very often 150,000. See below for more

impressive successes much like Mentor's – conspicuously, one of Anchor's first titles, Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, and one of Vintage's, Richard Hofstadter's *The American Political Tradition*, eventually reached the million-sales mark attained by Benedict<sup>27</sup> – Mentor remained the market leader until the early 1960s. Pelican had fewer competitors until the 1960s, although it was then challenged and finally capitulated to colour covers.<sup>28</sup> Both imprints benefited also from their early start, in that they had impressive backlists which formed an ever larger proportion of sales as paperbacks moved in both countries into the bookshops in a big way in the late 1950s.<sup>29</sup> Although by then the hardcover publishers were increasingly retaining the paperback rights for their own egghead imprints, Pelican and Mentor continued to thrive by commissioning their own books and selling on the rights to an initial hardcover edition. Their early start also meant that these two imprints were in the best position to benefit from a general shift from fiction to non-fiction reading in both countries that came about as a result of rising educational opportunity.<sup>30</sup>

## II

Having surveyed and compared the emergence of these two imprints and their dominant position through the 1960s, I turn now to a closer examination of who were their

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on Mentor's readership, and for a direct comparison with the egghead books, NAL Newsletter, 16 Mar. 1955: NAL Archive, 97/2999.

<sup>27</sup> *The Lonely Crowd* sold 540,000 in the Anchor edition up to 1960, at which point the paperback rights were resumed by Yale University Press, and it sold 1m in all editions by 1970. Jane Olson, Yale UP, to Prof. Joffre Dumazedier, 22 Sep. 1964; Chester Kerr, Yale UP, to Riesman, 31 Mar. 1970: Harvard University Archives, David Riesman Papers, HUG(FP) 99.16, Box 41. On Hofstadter's sales, see Nick Witham, 'Popular History, Post-War Liberalism, and the Role of the Public Intellectual in Richard Hofstadter's *The American Political Tradition* (1948)', *Historical Journal*, lix (2016), 1147-8.

<sup>28</sup> Ian Norrie, *Mumby's Publishing and Bookselling in the Twentieth Century*, 6th edn (London, 1984), 160-1, 165-6; T. Booth Waddicor & Partners, 'The Marketing and Promotion of Penguin Books', Mar. 1960: Penguin Archive, DM1843/36; 'Penguins and Other Birds', *Observer*, 29 May 1960.

<sup>29</sup> On the strength of Pelican's backlist, see e.g. Julian Critchley, 'Hope of Greater Rewards in the World of Publishing', *Times*, 20 Nov. 1969, 11. Penguin had always sold primarily to bookshops, but in the 1960s paperback publishers in the U.S. were finally able to take advantage of an extended network of bookshops there as well, especially as chains such as Doubleday's and Brentano's began to grow. Miller, 'Selling the Product', 92-6.

<sup>30</sup> Schick, *Paperbound Book*, 90; Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 253-4; 'Hard Facts About Soft Covers', *The Author*, c. 1961: Penguin Archive, DM1294/3/4; Raymond Walters Jr., 'Market Report: Trends of a Year', *New York Times Book Review*, 14 Jan. 1962, 22; Beth Luey, 'The Organization of the Book Publishing Industry', in Nord et al. (eds.), *The Enduring Book*, 46-7. The shift to non-fiction based on widening educational opportunity was an international phenomenon: see Mercer, 'Paperback Revolution', 617.

readers and what did they read. At this point conclusions become necessarily more tentative, given the fragmentary nature of the available sources. Nevertheless, a certain amount can be gleaned from the keen market observations of the likes of Lane and Weybright. First of all, we can be pretty certain that Lane and Weybright were correct to conclude that they had found a new market. There is a certain amount of cynicism about this – it is said, for example, that paperbacks only caused cheapskate buyers to shift from cloth to paper, or that the new market was for pulp fiction and the so-called quality lines only sold to a limited number of college graduates.<sup>31</sup> To answer these criticisms requires separate consideration of the two countries, as they started in very different places.

In the United States, as we have seen, at the beginning of this period reading books was the pursuit of a minority and buying them the pursuit of a small minority. In a 1949 survey, only 21% of American adults (and only 43% even of college graduates) claimed to be reading a book at the time of the survey as opposed to 55% of all adults in England a few years later.<sup>32</sup> Despite their educational advantages, therefore, Americans seemed to be under-consuming books. Social reformers puzzled over why this was – did the deficiency lie in demand (American being more utilitarian, preferring quick-fix newspapers and magazines) or in supply (those pesky wide-open-spaces that made distribution of bulky items so difficult)?<sup>33</sup> There seems little doubt that the Pocket Books solution addressed the supply-side problem, by extending distribution from some hundreds of bookshops to tens of thousands of magazine and newspaper outlets. But paperbacks also seemed to stimulate demand. It was widely reported that Americans didn't even read books while at college,

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, August Heckscher, 'Reading in America: Its Social and Cultural Background', in Price (ed.), *Reading for Life*, 46-7, and subsequent exchanges 216-20, and the interestingly more uncertain later commentary by Cyril O. Houle, 'Two Revolutions and Their Consequences: The Paperback in Our Contemporary Culture', *ALA Bulletin* 56 (1962), 652-62.

<sup>32</sup> Lester Asheim, 'A Survey of Recent Research', in Price (ed.), *Reading for Life*, 3-4. A Gallup Poll in 1955 found a still lower rate of current reading at 17%. *Publishers Weekly*, 21 May 1955, 2244.

<sup>33</sup> Joan Shelley Rubin, 'Making Meaning: Analysis and Affect in the Study and Practice of Reading', in Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway (eds.), *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill NC, 2009), 514-16; Kett, *Pursuit of Knowledge*, 370-7.

where books were widely available at least in libraries (only a quarter of American colleges had bookstores).<sup>34</sup> Paperbacks were said to be stimulating the reading (and ownership) of books *at* college – where more self-service bookshops were opening to sell them – and *after* college, where formerly marooned suburbanites (especially housewives) and small-town dwellers could now find books at their local drugstores, coffee shops, smoke shops and variety stores.<sup>35</sup> There is every reason to believe that this market covered both men – principally, commuters – and the classic bored housewife, who had been whisked off to suburban or small-town isolation shortly after college graduation, the subject of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (which itself sold 1.5 million in paperback).<sup>36</sup>

If there was a general shift to non-fiction among post-war readers, this must have been due not only to increasing educational attainment but also to the increasing availability of non-fiction titles in paperback. Whereas in the early 1950s few colleges had bookstores and few sold books beyond immediate classroom needs, by the late 1950s college towns and metropolitan centres benefited from a mushrooming of bookshops dedicated to paperbacks and aimed at both students and graduates: famously, places like Cody's (opened in 1956) and Moe's (1959), which billed itself as 'the largest all-paperback bookstore in the world', both in Berkeley, or the famous Kroch-Brentano 'Super Book Mart' with 7500 paperback titles in an enormous Chicago basement (1955).<sup>37</sup> This supermarketing of books established an entirely new relationship between book and buyer which we now take for granted – as the *TLS*

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<sup>34</sup> Harold K. Guinzburg, 'The Role of the Campus Bookstore and Campus Media of Communication', in Price (ed.), *Reading for Life*, 202.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 203; Robert Marshall, 'The Paperback and the College Bookstore', *ALA Bulletin* 56 (1962), 821-5.

<sup>36</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York, 2011), 106-7, 148. This impression is borne out by the fragmentary evidence of letters from readers in the NAL Archive. Paperback rights to *The Feminine Mystique* were bought by Dell, a downmarket mass-market fiction publisher since the early days of paperbacking which had poached the Mentor editor Marc Jaffe in 1959 and developed its own upscale imprint 'Laurel': Davis, *Two Bit Culture*, 269-71, 304.

<sup>37</sup> On Cody's and Moe's, see Aaron Cometbus, 'The Loneliness of the Electric Menorah', *Cometbus*, li (2008). Thanks to Michael Saler and Daniel Stolzenberg for this reference. On paperback supermarkets in Chicago, New York, Boston and Detroit from around 1955, see Schick, *Paperbound Book*, 91. Brentano's paperback basement in New York set up a few years earlier was much smaller. 'Selling Paper-Covered Books in a Large Bookstore', *Publishers Weekly*, 28 Mar. 1953, 1426-7.

marveled in 1957, ‘you make your rounds of the serried, signposted racks and bring your armful of purchases to one of the three exit gates, where you pay and are given a paper bag if you want one.’<sup>38</sup>

In a country like postwar America, where college education was becoming very general, there should be no need to apologize for a focus on college graduates – the graduate market was a mass market.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, there is evidence that Mentor paperbacks reached wider strata still. Although they were not typically stocked (certainly not in large numbers) by the full range of retail outlets, nevertheless they were routinely distributed to about 25,000 of them – that is, at least 10 times the number of bookshops – accounting for about two-thirds of total Mentor sales.<sup>40</sup> Retail outlets that stocked and sold large numbers of Mentors (including backlist titles) tended to be ‘heavy traffic’ sites such as bus, rail and air terminals, but Weybright worked hard to persuade his distributors that a selection of Mentors at other outlets would extend their market and could even lead to high turnover. ‘Mentor books are aimed at the general reader including not only the book store buyer with knowledge of books but at the newsstand buyer with no such knowledge’, he wrote to his field reps in 1955. ‘Consequently, we dramatize the subject matter on the covers of our Mentors in such a way that the newsstand buyer is tempted to buy the book by the interest created by the cover picture. This cover appeal has probably attracted millions of more regular book buyers to non-fiction books.’<sup>41</sup> George Kennan’s *American Diplomacy* sold nearly half a million copies in the course of the ‘50s, and was thought to go ‘extremely well’ on newsstands.<sup>42</sup> Suzanne Langer’s *Philosophy in a New Key*, a very sophisticated tract on aesthetics, sold the

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<sup>38</sup> John Carter, ‘Paperback Revolution’, *Times Literary Supplement Paperback Section*, 12 Jul. 1957, ii-iii.

<sup>39</sup> Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 101-2, 118, for an example of such an apology.

<sup>40</sup> Mentor Sales Statistics for the Years 1946 to 1952: NAL Archive, 97/2996; see also ‘Outsells the Average Mystery’, *Publishers Weekly*, 28 Feb. 1953, 1048, though Weybright’s hard-sell should be read with caution.

<sup>41</sup> NAL Newsletter, 16 Mar. 1955: NAL Archive, 97/2999.

<sup>42</sup> NAL Archive, 53/1070.

vast majority of its first printing of 62,000 through magazine and newspaper outlets.<sup>43</sup> Crane Brinton, the Harvard historian, declared himself ‘even more astonished than Susanne Langer...to find myself on newsstands, but it is a very pleasant feeling.’<sup>44</sup> When the egghead rivals appeared, Weybright was able still to win reprint rights on the basis that only he could really compete for this newsstand market, a pitch that (improbably) won him reprint rights to Maurice Bowra’s *The Greek Experience* in 1958.<sup>45</sup> To dive deeper into this market, in 1953 Weybright introduced the Signet Key line, ‘an extension of our non-fiction range, slightly more elementary in presentation than our Mentor books’, explicitly to appeal to non-graduates, and also to the retailers, who distributed this line along with the main Signet fiction titles.<sup>46</sup> Overall, Weybright estimated that ‘most of the readers of Mentors, and more than half of the readers of Signet Key and Signet non-fiction, constitute a new audience, not an audience that has switched from fiction to subject non-fiction’.<sup>47</sup> It was, surely, in part this new audience – and not only the growth of educational opportunity – that led to the sharp swing to non-fiction, accelerating in the 1960s.<sup>48</sup> It was also this new audience that swelled book-buying in America by 250% to 1.3 billion per annum between 1947 and 1967, the period of the paperback revolution, after which point growth slowed in unit sales, increasing in gross terms only because the price of paperbacks was then rising.<sup>49</sup>

The British story was different because it began with more readers and more bookshops. While Allen Lane had relied on Woolworth’s and the newsagent chains, notably

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<sup>43</sup> Arabel Porter to Victor Weybright and Kurt Enoch, 14 Feb. 1950: NAL Archive, 27/278, and see also 54/1129.

<sup>44</sup> Crane Brinton to Marc Jaffe, 25 Jan. 1954: NAL Archive, 14/204.

<sup>45</sup> Victor Weybright to file, 16 Jan. 1958: NAL Archive, 14/195.

<sup>46</sup> Weybright memorandum, n.d. (1953): NAL Archive, 97/3005; Truman Talley to George Soule, 14 Jan. 1957: NAL Archive, 68/1696; Bonn, *Heavy Traffic*, 50.

<sup>47</sup> Weybright to Frederic Melcher, *Publisher’s Weekly*, 20 Jun. 1957: quoted by Bonn, *Heavy Traffic*, 50.

<sup>48</sup> Luey, ‘Organization of the Book Publishing Industry’, 46-7, emphasizes the educational market alone; Scott, ‘Markets and Audiences’, 73-6, 79-81, gives additional weight to affluence and paperback innovation.

<sup>49</sup> Laura J. Miller and David Paul Nord, ‘Reading the Data on Books, Newspapers, and Magazines: A Statistical Appendix’, in Nord et al. (eds.), *The Enduring Book*, 511. Paperbacks accounted for over half of unit sales as early as 1960.



W.H. Smith, to break the retail monopoly of the shops in the 1930s, once inside the shops after the war he was able to sell 80% of his Penguins through them rather than other retail outlets, in large part because there were now plenty of readers seeking books in shops.<sup>50</sup> Quite apart from the unusual peaks of reading in wartime, a Mass-Observation survey in 1947 found that two-thirds of adults read books – as many as read magazines – for an average of 5 hours a week – and a third of all adults bought paperbacks. A great deal of soul-searching went on at the time, and has since, about the additional finding that what MO called the ‘Penguin public’ amounted to only 9% of the general population and, even amongst book-readers, only 8% of working-class readers.<sup>51</sup> But its definition of the ‘Penguin public’ set the bar too high – it only counted respondents who spontaneously mentioned Penguin in response to all three questions about paperbacks in general, specific paperbacks, and the best paperbacks, and then reported them as a proportion of the general public. In other questions, it became clear that over three-quarters of the book-reading public owned paperbacks, and of these, perhaps half bought Penguins<sup>52</sup> – in other words, the true ‘Penguin public’ amounted to around a third of the book-reading public.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, its definition of working-class set the bar too low – it excluded all those whom it dubbed ‘artisans’ – 53% of whom bought paperbacks, and a quarter of whom bought Penguins.<sup>54</sup>

Penguin’s postwar growth, from its very high prewar levels, was slower than its American comparators. By 1960 Americans were buying more paperbacks per capita than

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<sup>50</sup> Mansell, ‘Conversations with Allen Lane’.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Penguin World’, 38-40; Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950* (Oxford, 1992), 59.

<sup>52</sup> This is my attempt to reconcile the contradictory findings of ‘Penguin World’, 38-40, 83-4, 96.

<sup>53</sup> This should have been evident anyway from its market share, which was over 20% of all UK paperback sales as late as 1956, by which time there were many rivals for the fiction market. Compare quantity sales of 10.4m for 1956 (Penguin Archive, DM1294/4/2/7) to total British paperback sales in all markets of 50m reported in Liam Gervais, ‘There’s Gold in Them Thar Paperbacks’, *Printing News*, 27 Dec. 1956.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Penguin World’, 83-6. And since ownership reported at higher levels than buying, more than that owned some.

the British.<sup>55</sup> Penguin's domestic sales took a long time to recover even to prewar levels – they were still just below that point in 1957, Lane having refused to market more aggressively – but a change of tack and a surge in demand fuelled rapid growth in the 1960s, up to a peak in 1974, by which time domestic sales had probably doubled from prewar levels.<sup>56</sup> However, Penguin's quality lines had a stronger hold on the market than its comparators in the U.S., even after the entrance of the egghead publishers, so that per capita sales of quality fiction and non-fiction were probably not surpassed by the Americans through the 1970s. Britain experienced the same shift as in the U.S. from fiction to non-fiction over the course of the '50s and '60s. Thus Pelican was a growth area in this period in the context of a stable market. Contemporaries noted the arrival in the late 1950s in quite modest homes of the 'reference' shelf of Pelicans and similar paperbacks.<sup>57</sup> While educational attainment in Britain was falling further behind America at the higher levels, after 1947 all British teenagers were at least attending secondary school, and there is evidence that parents were buying them (or enabling them to buy for themselves) more books.<sup>58</sup> Much attention has been paid to the place of the Penguin in the life of the grammar-school boy (less so the girl), but the majority of teenagers who did not go to grammar school were also part of this market. In other words, despite a tendency to wax nostalgic about the golden age of the '30s and '40s, and despite Britain's lag in access to higher education,

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<sup>55</sup> 'Penguins and Other Birds', *Observer*, 29 May 1960, cited 70m in the U.K., 300m in the U.S.; by 1966, the margin was reported to have widened: Mercer, 'Paperback Revolution', 617.

<sup>56</sup> Unit sales from 1935 to 1979 can be found in Penguin Archive, DM1294/4/2/7, but these figures need to be adjusted to account for exports, 16% of sales in 1957 ('Analysis of Sales', DM1843/36), and possibly over half by 1970 (Leith McGrandle, 'Happier times for paperback publishers', *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 Mar. 1970); see also 'Competition for World Markets', *Times Supplement on Paperbacks*, 19 May 1960, ii; Critchley, 'Hope of Greater Rewards'.

<sup>57</sup> 'Widening the Circle', *The Times Literary Supplement Paperback Section*, 12 Jul. 1957. There were already significant numbers of Pelicans – in proportion to their general market share – in working-class homes visited by Mass-Observation in 1947. The much lower figures given in the same report for Pelican sales to working-class customers relied on respondents to discriminate their Pelican purchases from their Penguins. 'Penguin World', cf. 85 with 122-3, 127-8.

<sup>58</sup> 'Books and the Public', Mass-Observation Report 1332(2 Jul. 1943), 102, 115, 117, 127.

Penguins – and Pelicans – were almost certainly reaching as wide an audience through 3000 bookshops as Mentors were through 25,000 retail outlets.<sup>59</sup>

### III

What did they read? Surveying such extensive backlists is no easy task. One point to emphasize is that the size of the backlist was itself important to both Lane and Weybright. The process of selection by the consumer was supposed to be a key element in the Pelican and Mentor experience. Despite their differences, as Billy Williams wrote to Weybright in 1946, they shared ‘the most violent sensations of complete agreement’ on one point, that ‘there is “an intangible element of self-education” in the fact that people have to select their books... the cause of an increasing selectiveness and judgment’.<sup>60</sup> This is why Lane preferred to sell through bookshops and why Weybright, though he worked hard to get Mentors onto the newsstands, was particularly proud of the extensive displays in the book supermarkets springing up by the late 1950s. For the same reason, it was important for both lines to offer titles across the full range of disciplines – from the sciences and social sciences to the arts, history, philosophy, religion, classics and archaeology – and to remain open to surprises from their readers. From this point of view, the label of ‘gatekeeper’ applied to Lane and Weybright is only half-right: of course, they decided what to publish and set standards, but both as businessmen and educators they were concerned to keep the gates swinging both ways.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> ‘Pocket Reading’, *Times*, 24 Jul. 1956; Marghanita Laski, ‘Penguin Public’, *Observer*, 29 Jul. 1956; Richard Hoggart, ‘The Reader’, in *Penguins Progress 1935-1960* (Harmondsworth, 1960), 27-9; ‘How Paperbacks are Sold’, *The Author*, Mar. 1963, 2-3; Lewis, *Penguin Special*, 274-5.

<sup>60</sup> W.E. Williams to Victor Weybright, 6 Mar. 1946: Penguin Archive, DM1294/3/2.

<sup>61</sup> Bonn, *Heavy Traffic*, 2-3; cf. Lewis A. Coser, Charles Kadushin and Walter W. Powell, *Books: The Culture and Commerce of Publishing* (New York, 1982), 365; and cf. also the idea of ‘guided’ reading in Rubin, *Making of Middlebrow Culture*, 31, and Matthew S. Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2013), 55-6.

If we start with Pelican, looking at a list of its global bestsellers to 1968<sup>62</sup> we can see immediately a preponderance of what we might call traditional humanities – classics, literature, history – reflecting the list’s prewar origins. But looking more closely, even these bestsellers do not look quite so traditional. The history is not predominantly traditional narrative or even political history – it includes landmarks of social history (Tawney, and Gordon Childe’s archaeological survey) and the narratives, such as David Thomson’s, were noted for ‘keeping away from a text-book parade of events’ and leaning ‘heavily away from the “Whig” interpretation’, in line with the leftish adult-education orientation of Pelican and its audience.<sup>63</sup> Much more social history features further down the bestseller list, long before E.P. Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class* became a bestselling Pelican in 1968. So does archaeology, a complete surprise to Penguin’s bosses. Social science does not feature prominently in this list, but after the war Pelican had many successes with psychology in particular, in a series edited by the Birkbeck academic C.A. Mace – some cashing in on an interest in sex, but others on child care, much more conceptual than Spock (such as the ‘attachment’ theorists Bowlby and Winnicott<sup>64</sup>), and above all the works of Hans Eysenck, not only on intelligence testing, but a full range of issues in psychological science.<sup>65</sup> Between them history and psychology accounted for about half of the top bestselling Pelicans. Another substantial share was taken by literature, especially Boris Ford’s Pelican

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<sup>62</sup> Penguin Archive, DM1294/4/2/7. As these are global sales, account must be taken of exports, especially for the top few items, which were in hot demand from colleges in the U.S. in particular.

<sup>63</sup> J.E. Morpurgo, ‘Penguin History, Nineteenth Century: Dr David Thomson’, n.d. (Apr. 1948): Penguin Archive, DM1107/A197.

<sup>64</sup> Bowlby’s *Child Care* sold over 20,000 copies a year, Winnicott’s *The Child, the Family and the Outside World* just short of those levels, but they were both outsold by J.A. Hadfield’s *Childhood and Adolescence* and C.I. Sandstrom’s *The Psychology of Childhood and Adolescence*. The reception of Bowlby and Winnicott attracts a lot of attention, notably from historians of psychoanalysis, but less psychoanalytic texts less so. A balanced account can be found in Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford, 2013), ch. 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Know Your Own IQ* and *Test Your Own IQ* were Eysenck’s bestsellers, selling over 25,000 copies a year, but *The Uses and Abuses of Psychology* sold over 100,000 copies in its first two years, 1953-5, and over 15,000 copies a year thereafter, and *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* at nearly those levels (Penguin Archive, DM1294/4/2/7, DM1107/A281). Many more technical works in Mace’s series also sold well.

guides, and, from the late 1950s onwards, sociology – modern classics such as Richard Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy*, J.H. Galbraith’s *Affluent Society*, Vance Packard’s *Hidden Persuaders*, Young and Willmott’s *Family and Kinship in East London*, Jackson and Marsden’s *Education and the Working Class*, and Michael Young’s *Rise of Meritocracy*, all sold at a rate of 10-25,000 copies a year over many years.<sup>66</sup> This late move into sociology reflected Lane’s ability to rejuvenate his list, not least by taking on new staff – Dieter Pevsner (son of the architectural historian), who took general charge of Pelicans, and Tony Godwin, who aligned Penguin with the social and intellectual movements of the 1960s and finally foisted colour covers on Allen Lane. Pevsner and Godwin kept Pelicans diverse and experimental long after Lane and Williams had lost touch with contemporary culture and, indeed, had lost interest.<sup>67</sup>

Equally interesting to note is what did not sell, despite the gatekeepers’ best efforts to push it. Apart from a few numeracy manuals, science never did well, though it is supposed to play an important role in Cold War culture.<sup>68</sup> Nor did economics, nor politics. Part of the nostalgia of postwar commentators for the ‘30s and ‘40s heyday was for a politically-mobilized readership who hoovered up ‘Penguin Specials’ and appeared ready for duty in the New Jerusalem.<sup>69</sup> The Specials were abandoned after the war and nothing took their place until Godwin revived them in the ‘60s, with limited success. Pelican readers apparently wanted to understand themselves and their society, but were not excited by party politics or policy, apart from education policy. Given this bias, and their relative success in the United States., it is surprising that philosophy and religion did not feature prominently in the Pelican

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<sup>66</sup> The bestseller list in Penguin Archive, DM1294/4/2/7, lists 96 Pelicans, from which these calculations are taken. There is some duplication between the ‘top 12’ and the remaining 84, which are listed by annual sales.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Joicey, ‘Penguin Books’, 186-99, giving a gloomier view of the postwar world, justifying his terminal date of 1956, and Blackburn, ‘Penguin Books’, 228-37, who sees the departures of the ‘60s as less pluralistic.

<sup>68</sup> This is all the more striking given the prominence that Lane gave science in the first wave of Pelicans before the war. For Penguin’s struggles to popularize science after the war, see David Lutyens, ‘Science Report’, n.d. (1959): Penguin Archive, DM1819/14/2; Rex Malik, ‘Penguin Books’, *Aspect*, Mar. 1963, 32-6.

<sup>69</sup> Joicey, ‘Penguin Books’, 168-70, 175-81; Lewis, *Penguin Special*, 203-4, 347; Hare (ed.), *Penguin Portrait*, 280-1. Some of the sociology bestsellers – for example, Vance Packard – were published as Specials.

list. Part of the blame must lie with the philosopher Freddy Ayer, who had firm control of the Pelican philosophy series and kept it dry and academic. But it does appear too as if the Pelican reader had a more hard-headed preference for empirical psychological, sociological and historical studies.<sup>70</sup>

How do the Mentor reader's preferences compare? There is not to my knowledge a bestseller list for Mentors to compare with Pelican's, though we do have a snapshot from around 1954, reporting on bestsellers in bookstores and colleges only (not other retail outlets, which sold the majority of Mentors).<sup>71</sup> From this and other scattered data, we can arrive at some safe generalizations. First, history and literature play nothing like the same role on the Mentor list. There were a few exceptions – Richard Heffner's *Documentary History of the United States* sold well on college campuses, Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* sold over 300,000 copies in Mentor (vs. 450,000 in Pelican, in a population 1/3 or 1/4 the size), Crane Brinton's *Ideas and Men* probably even better.<sup>72</sup> But compare these figures to Pelicans', where at least a dozen history titles sold at a rate equivalent to 1 million+ in the United States. It was difficult, complained Weybright, to slim history and biography down to the size needed to fit into a 35c Mentor – even Brinton's book had had to be split into two.<sup>73</sup> An exception to this shunning of traditional high culture was classical mythology. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were perennial bestsellers in both countries in paperback, largely to the college market. Pelican found a more general interpreter of Ancient Greece to provide a definitive treatment, H.D.F. Kitto, whose book *The Greeks* was far and away the bestselling Pelican of this entire period at 1.3m copies.<sup>74</sup> More surprisingly, Weybright found in Edith

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<sup>70</sup> Dieter Pevsner to Eunice Frost, 12 Nov. 1958; D. Pevsner, 'Future Editorial Plans: New Pelican Subjects': Penguin Archive, DM1843/54, DM1819/14/3. Cf. Blackburn, 'Penguin Books', 226-8.

<sup>71</sup> NAL Archive, 97/2996; and see useful information on paperback bestsellers, including Mentor, in Freeman Lewis, 'Paper-Bound Books in America' (1953), in *Bowker Lectures on Book Publishing* (New York, 1957), 306-35.

<sup>72</sup> NAL Archive, 45/901, 70/1765.

<sup>73</sup> Victor Weybright to Henry Steele Commager, 9 Mar. 1948: NAL Archive, 28/384.

<sup>74</sup> Hare (ed.), *Penguin Portrait*, 187-9; Hans Alsen, 'Homer Tops Paperbacks', *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 Mar. 1963; Penguin Archive, DM1294/4/2/7.

Hamilton a similar interpreter to the Americans. While *The Roman Way* sold chiefly to college stores, *The Greek Way* and, especially, *Mythology* also flew off the newsstands.<sup>75</sup>

More predictably, social science began to sell well earlier in the U.S., in a more sophisticated echo of the established American vogue for self-help books. To the chart-topping successes of Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* and (for Anchor Books) of Riesman's *Lonely Crowd*<sup>76</sup> we must add a number of anthropological bestsellers by Margaret Mead for Mentor, probably totaling well over a million copies by 1960.<sup>77</sup> Surprisingly, psychology did markedly less well than in Britain – apart from sex. American readers were very keen to acquire explicit sexual knowledge. The Kinsey Reports were of course the starting pistol for this rush; though the reports themselves were too long and turgid to sell in paperback, Weybright quickly packaged up a little book entitled About the Kinsey Report and sold 1.5 million copies in a matter of months, over six times as many as the supposedly 'bestselling' hardcover.<sup>78</sup> Sex was also behind Mentor's successful drive to emulate Pelican in paperbacking Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, which the Mentor editors hoped would sell to '[n]ewsstand readers who are attracted or repelled, but in any case fascinated by the name Freud (and all the misconceptions of sex and evil the name conjures up.)'<sup>79</sup> Even

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<sup>75</sup> In its first ten years, *The Greek Way* sold 300,000 copies, over half through the wholesalers, and *Mythology* must have sold at least a million (14 printings to 1960, including a reissue of 200,000 in 1960, again more than half for the wholesalers): 'Sales sheet, 17 Mar. 1958'; Victor Weybright to Storer B. Lunt, WW. Norton & Co., 11 Nov. 1958; Arabel Porter to Victor Weybright, 1 Nov. 1949: NAL Archive, 44/849, 851.

<sup>76</sup> There had been disagreements within NAL about acquiring the rights to *The Lonely Crowd* – Lindeman feared it would be too highbrow, and his doubts appear to have outweighed Weybright's (and his son-in-law Truman Talley's) enthusiasm. E.C. Lindeman to Victor Weybright, 25 Feb. 1951, with annotations: NAL Archive, 56/1177.

<sup>77</sup> NAL Archive, 57/1238, 1241, 1243, and Victor Weybright to Thayer Hobson, William Morrow Co., 20 Oct. 1952: 57/1237.

<sup>78</sup> Donald Porter Geddes and Enid Curie (eds.), *About the Kinsey Report*, was published as a Signet Special in May 1948. Its first printing of 750,000 sold out in two weeks and a second printing of 750,000 followed. As late as 1954, it was still selling 120,000 copies a year in this edition: Arabel J. Porter to Ashley Montagu, 11 Jun. 1948; Kurt Enoch, 'Tentative April Production and Distribution Schedule', 11 Jan. 1954: NAL Archive, 39/704A, 97/3009. Bantam also published a mass-market paperback digest, Morris Ernst and David Loth (eds.), *American Sexual Behavior and the Kinsey Report*. Though the vast majority of Kinsey 'readers' read the reports through these media, the paperbacking of Kinsey is not discussed in Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge MA, 2007), only mentioned 237, or James H. Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Life* (New York, 1997).

<sup>79</sup> Editorial Dopesheet, Arabel J. Porter, 'The Psychopathology of Everyday Life', 23 May 1951: NAL Archive, 39/706. Cf. Nathan G. Hale, Jr., *Freud and the Americans: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the*

the pre-Freudian Havelock Ellis sold like hotcakes under the right title – *The Psychology of Sex* sold nearly half a million copies in the 1950s.<sup>80</sup> But apart from sex, psychology had nothing like the same market as in Britain.<sup>81</sup>

As in Britain, neither politics nor economics nor science did particularly well, though all figured prominently in the publishers' ideas of what kinds of knowledge made for good citizenship. Economics was a drug on the market, except for college textbooks.<sup>82</sup> Science did somewhat better in the U.S. – especially if you count Rachel Carson's early environmental works, The Sea Around Us and Silent Spring, which had no equivalent in Britain<sup>83</sup> As for politics, Weybright dutifully collaborated with the State Department in distributing books on U.S. history and politics abroad, with many translations into Asian languages paid for by the government.<sup>84</sup> His own politics were social-democratic – he had no problem promoting anti-communism, though not where it trenched on civil liberties, and published a good deal of pro-labour propaganda – but his readers weren't much interested in either.<sup>85</sup> He never attempted anything like the Penguin Specials, feeling, as he wrote about Bertrand Russell in 1958, that 'the paperbound book with a thesis, dealing with a great public

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*United States, 1876-1917* (New York, 1971), 430-2, on the 1940s as the breakthrough for Freud's popularity, and the Nathan G. Hale Jr., *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985* (New York, 1995), ch. 16, on the immediate postwar decades as the 'golden age' of his popularization. In the paperback market this popularization was inhibited by tight control of rights by the Freud Estate.

<sup>80</sup> 450,000 copies were printed between 1954 and 1960. Calvin Hall's Primer of Freudian Psychology sold at about the same levels at the same time. NAL Archive, 36/535, 44/845.

<sup>81</sup> Apart from Kinsey, Freud and Margaret Mead, there were no Mentor psychology titles on either the college or bookstore bestseller lists in the early 1950s: NAL Archive, 97/2996.

<sup>82</sup> Arabel Porter to Victor Weybright, 15 Feb. 1949; Truman Talley to Victor Weybright, 1 Dec. 1950; August Heckscher to George Soule, 3 Aug. 1956; Truman Talley to Richard J. Crohn, 2 Oct. 1957 (contrasting the success of religion and philosophy to economics and sociology): NAL Archive, 68/1696, 1697.

<sup>83</sup> The Sea Around Us was the top-selling Mentor in both colleges and bookstores in the early 1950s, with a print-run of 300,000 in 1954 alone: see NAL Archive, 96/2978, 97/3009; Bruce V. Lewenstein, 'Science Books since 1945', in Nord et al. (eds.), *The Enduring Book*, 355-7, and Priscilla Coit Murphy, 'Books and the Media: The Silent Spring Debate', in *ibid.*, 448-50.

<sup>84</sup> Weybright accepted subsidy for the translations but not for the sales: he was not willing to have government-sponsored books undercutting his own selections. Victor Weybright to Kurt Enoch and Richard Crohn, 22 Jul. 1955: NAL Archive, 72/1846.

<sup>85</sup> See for example Lindeman and Weybright's doubts about the writing of T.V. Smith, and the 'negativism' of an over-heated anti-communism; in any case, Smith did not sell well; also E.C. Lindeman to Victor Weybright, 11 Jun. 1951; 'Suggestions taken from KE's Letters', 28 Apr. 1952: NAL Archive, 68.1/1676, 56/1177, 96/2982.



issue, even if written by an outstanding genius, is regarded as a tract and eschewed by what should be the natural audience for such a book.’<sup>86</sup> It may be, of course, that the political conformism of Cold War America stifled the interest of both readers and publishers alike – local censorship was certainly an enduring nuisance to Weybright, though applied almost always to sex and religion rather than to politics<sup>87</sup> – and it is probably true that Weybright was less politically free-wheeling than Lane, less inclined to experiment with the wilder shores of politics. But it seems unlikely that Weybright would have held back if he thought there was a market for more radical politics, as he was evidently disappointed by the failures of the market to respond to, for example, his impressive initiatives in tackling racial questions<sup>88</sup>, and he would undoubtedly have been very disappointed to have lost Rachel Carson – with whom he was closely associated in the 1950s – when she published her more polemical bestseller *Silent Spring* with one of his principal mass-market rivals, Fawcett, in 1964.<sup>89</sup>

Instead – and here the American market was very different from the British – American readers showed an inexhaustible appetite for philosophy and comparative religion, the affluent society seeming at first to promote spiritual questioning rather than political and economic critique. Mentor even marketed one book on technology as if it were the opposite, ‘a view of life that looks beyond material improvement alone’.<sup>90</sup> The market for philosophy

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<sup>86</sup> Victor Weybright to Sir Stanley Unwin, 4 Dec. 1958: NAL Archive, 65/1558.

<sup>87</sup> See, e.g., Victor Weybright to E.C. Lindeman, 24 May 1949; Truman Talley to Victor Weybright, 2 May 1955: NAL Archive, 56/1176, 34/500; Houle, ‘Two Revolutions’, 655.

<sup>88</sup> These initiatives ranged from efforts to sell to the African-American community to patronage of African-American authors to more explicitly political interventions on matters of race; as early as 1948 Weybright took on Ellen Tarry as ‘special consultant’ to advise on these matters. See NAL Archive, 4/20, and for Weybright’s sense of ‘obligation’ to publish African-American authors and on race relations in the face of ‘modest acceptance in our market’, Victor Weybright to Hardwick Moseley, 14 Nov. 1950: NAL Archive, 56/1186. A great deal more could be said on this subject; among other contributions, Weybright procured a substantial subvention for Alain Locke from the Rockefeller Foundation. Alain Locke to Victor Weybright, 19 Feb. 1951: NAL Archive, 56/1186.

<sup>89</sup> On Weybright’s outstanding success with Carson, see NAL Archive, 21/311; unfortunately, it is hard to say anything about how and why he lost her to Fawcett (his own former national distributor and subsequently a rival as a publisher), as nothing is said about the paperbacking of *Silent Spring* in the definitive work, Priscilla Coit Murphy, *What A Book Can Do: The Publication and Reception of Silent Spring* (Amherst, Mass., 2005).

<sup>90</sup> Editorial Dopesheet, ‘The Shape of Tomorrow’, 17 Jan. 1958: NAL Archive, 68/1696.

made itself apparent from the beginning, with the surprise success of Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*, which quickly sold out its first printing in 1948, two-thirds on newsstands, and clocked up 300,000 in sales by 1960<sup>91</sup>, and was used explicitly by Weybright to launch other philosophy titles, such as Alfred North Whitehead's *Aims of Education*, and to commission Isaiah Berlin and Stuart Hampshire among others to edit a series of anthologies of the great philosophers.<sup>92</sup> Even the history and philosophy of science sold well – Conant's *On Understanding Science*, noted by Riesman, and Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World*, both sold at or above Langer's level.<sup>93</sup>

Classics of philosophy may have fit with traditional views of high culture, but Weybright and his colleagues were not prepared for the related boom in classics of non-Christian religion. It seems to have been Anne Fremantle, one of the Mentor Philosophers editors, an expert on medieval religion and herself for a time a Muslim convert, who persuaded Weybright to have a punt on Marmaduke Pickthall's authorized English translation of the Koran. He was astonished to find it selling 350,000 copies in five years, 50 copies a day to commuters from Grand Central Station alone.<sup>94</sup> This spawned an equally successful Mentor Religious Classics series including Christopher Isherwood's translation of the Bhagavad-Gita and E.A. Burt's *Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*. By the end of the 1950s, this complex of philosophy, history and philosophy of science, and comparative religion had become a mainstay of the Mentor line, with its own in-house editor, the budding novelist E.L. Doctorow.<sup>95</sup> It formed a distinct novelty in postwar America – as late as 1940,

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<sup>91</sup> Donald Demarest to Arabel Porter, 16 May 1949; print runs for Langer; Editorial Dopesheet, 'Language: A Modern Synthesis', 27 May 1957: 27/378, 54/1129, 75/1960.

<sup>92</sup> For Whitehead's print runs, see NAL Archive, 75/1978, 1980; for the Mentor Philosophers, see 44/855, 57/1259. Penguin were very cross about NAL's thievery of British philosophers to lead this series, and as Weybright pointed out smugly they greatly outsold Ayer's turgid series for Penguin. Harry Paroissien to Eunice Frost, 6 Nov. 1953: quoted in Hare (ed.), *Penguin Portrait*, 154; Victor Weybright to Kurt Enoch, 20 Apr. 1961: NAL Archive, 78/2094.

<sup>93</sup> Victor Weybright to Joshua Whatmough, 2 Mar. 1953: NAL Archive, 28/385, 75/1960.

<sup>94</sup> Victor Weybright to C.A. Furth, 10 Feb. 1953: NAL Archive, 62/1442; Weybright, *Making of a Publisher*, 221-2.

<sup>95</sup> NAL Archive, 62/1442, 50/1019, 16/254.

‘extensive publication of the Koran [was] not expected in the United States’, according to a survey of reading, due to the weight of Christian opinion. The spiritual quests of the postwar period, very much fuelled by the paperback revolution, took Americans very far afield.<sup>96</sup> It may well have been that these quests satisfied some of the hunger for self-expression and recognition for ordinary readers that conventional politics did not, and that only later in the 1960s began to manifest politically in the more charged forms of the counterculture and radical politics.<sup>97</sup>

#### IV

Which brings us at last to Riesman’s original question – what did all these buyers of paperbacks make of what they read? Even with the files of the publishers open to our scrutiny, with their keen understandings of their readership, any answers to this question must be very speculative. Readers’ voices, beyond the exceptional case where letters to authors and editors exist in volume, are hard to capture, and their own personal repurposings of their reading harder still.<sup>98</sup> But it is worth speculating, if only to staunch the less well-grounded speculations of the many cultural critics who have denounced the effects of the paperback revolution without taking much effort to understand it. Famously, the Frankfurt School criticized the mass-marketing of culture for standardizing, and thus trivializing, works of art that on their own (and enjoyed in more salubrious forms) could elevate and critique. As Leo Lowenthal wrote of ‘historical information for the masses’, it ‘falsifies history’ by reducing it

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<sup>96</sup> Douglas Waples, Bernard Berelson and Franklyn R. Bradshaw, *What Reading Does to People: A Summary of Evidence on the Social Effects of Reading and a Statement of Problems for Research* (Chicago, 1940), 35. On the postwar boom in liberal forms of spirituality, see Hedstrom, *Rise of Liberal Religion*, esp. 174-224, and Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, ‘The Longing for Wisdom in Twentieth-Century US Thought’, in Joel Isaac et al. (eds.), *The Worlds of American Intellectual History* (New York, 2017), 182-201.

<sup>97</sup> See Alan Petigny’s suggestion that while ‘values’ were changing in Cold War America ‘norms’ were tightening, a growing contradiction that only burst into the public sphere (e.g. in political mobilization) in the later 1960s. In this view, philosophy and religion could offer means of expressing changing values without directly challenging dominant norms: *The Permissive Society: America, 1941-1965* (Cambridge, 2009).

<sup>98</sup> Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, is practically unique not only in exploiting readers’ letters but also in eliciting oral histories of personal uses of reading in this period; Murphy, *What a Book Can Do*, makes excellent use of an unusual outpouring of letters to magazine and newspaper editors.

to a ‘ridiculous accumulation of the most insignificant facts and figures’.<sup>99</sup> More humanistic critics shared this view. Richard Hoggart, echoing Matthew Arnold, deplored the new masses who ‘have views’ borrowed fourth-hand from sources such as the Pelican edition of Freud’s Psychopathology, but who ‘wander in the immensely crowded, startling, and often delusive world of ideas like children in their first Fairground House of Thrills – reluctant to leave, anxious to see and understand and respond to all, badly wanting to have a really enjoyable time, but, underneath, frightened.’ Whereas the ‘earnest minority’ of his own youth in the 1930s could harness themselves to wholesome social and political movements, now, in the 1950s, they had succumbed to ‘a fashionable “culture-vulture” wish’, lacking any connection to ‘the actuality of social and personal life’.<sup>100</sup> The irony is that these views were expressed in *The Uses of Literacy*, soon to be a Pelican bestseller, and moved an ageing Allen Lane to issue repeated invitations to Hoggart to take over Penguin Books as chief editor or even as owner.<sup>101</sup>

It is surely possible to find at least some ways in which serious non-fiction did address ‘the actuality of social and personal life’. A great deal of the most consistently bestselling non-fiction offered precisely resources by which individuals could seek to sharpen their sense of self – their cognitive and emotional selves (through psychology), their beliefs and values (through philosophy and religion). What made Suzanne Langer’s Philosophy in a New Key a surprise success with a mass audience is that it offered explicitly – in a text aimed at a more select audience in hardcover in 1942 – a programme for developing a sense of individual purpose, ‘to carry on our natural, impulsive, intelligent life, to realize plans,

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley, 1973), 213, and see ch. 6 generally for the critique of the ‘culture industry’.

<sup>100</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth, 1958), 304-46; cf. Hoggart’s later, more positive evaluation of Penguin, though still looking backward nostalgically, ‘The Penguin Generations: Communication with a Moral Conscience’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 21 Aug. 1970, 920.

<sup>101</sup> Allen Lane to Eunice Frost, 7 Mar. (1957); television interview with Hoggart, 1993: Penguin Archive, DM1843/8, 17, and on Lane’s abortive attempt in 1968 to hand over Penguin to a consortium of universities headed by Hoggart, see DM1294/3/4.

express ideas in action or in symbolic formulation, see and hear and interpret all things that we encounter, without fear of confusion, adjust our interests and expressions to each other'. Her 'new key' was a philosophy that addressed emotional as well as rational life through an understanding of the universal desire to 'symbolize' – something formerly catered to by ritual and myth – but in the modern, disenchanted world requiring new symbolizing realms – art, psychoanalysis, and indeed philosophy. Philosophy thus had a deep social mission to abjure the 'cryptic inventions of an academic class' and reconnect to 'the Man in the Street'.<sup>102</sup> Whitehead (the dedicatee of Langer's book) said much the same thing. So, obviously in their own way, did the Koran, the Gita and the Buddha, as did, in yet another register, Pelican's amazingly successful psychology series.

While the Pelican and Mentor editors of course did have a traditional 'high culture' mission, and felt that canonized art and literature were good in themselves, their commercial noses – and also their humanistic impulses – placed great emphasis on the *self*-fashioning that occurred when readers selected books off their own bat. This attitude chimed with (and was undoubtedly in part derived from) the belief in the individuating, self-empowering effect of reading held by the adult-education community on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>103</sup> In rejecting a self-help manual titled 'Improve Your Taste', the Mentor editors expressed the fear that 'there is too much social-pressure and authority-pressure in the arts anyway...this book would only tend to intensify it'.<sup>104</sup> As Williams had said to Weybright, the act of selection was as enriching as the lessons learnt from the selection. In this they anticipated postmodern

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<sup>102</sup> Suzanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 1st edn 1942 (New York, 1951), esp. 22-3, 45, 52-3, 81, 141-2, 170, 242-6.

<sup>103</sup> e.g. Waples et al., *What Reading Does*, 24-5, 29. Kett sees this impulse as a concession on the part of Arnoldians to 'a hedonistic consumer society', and already past its peak in the 1940s, after which even the adult-education community is thought to have capitulated to a bottom-line conception of reading as simply leisure: *Pursuit of Knowledge*, 331-3, 370-7, 389.

<sup>104</sup> Arabel Porter to Victor Weybright and Kurt Enoch, 12 Oct. 1948: NAL Archive, 2/8; and see similar sentiments in Arabel Porter to Victor Weybright, 12 Nov. 1948; Truman Talley to Victor Weybright and Kurt Enoch, 11 May 1950; Arabel Porter to Victor Weybright and Kurt Enoch, 18 Jan. 1950; Arabel Porter to Truman Talley, 25 Feb. 1952: NAL Archive, 98/3015, 13/154.

critiques of the Frankfurt School, asserting, as Umberto Eco did in defence of mass-market paperbacks in the *TLS* in 1965, the unknowability of the reader-response, including by the author.<sup>105</sup> The readers' selection of a range of unexpected titles in psychology, philosophy and religion, facilitated by the paperback publishers' own sensitive responses to readers, demonstrated their ability to march to their own drummer, using 'expertise' in hitherto unexplored fields in much the same way as Michael Saler has shown science fiction was used in this same period, to 're-enchant' their worlds.<sup>106</sup>

As with science fiction, too, the search for re-enchantment was not just an individuated quest, it was also relational. The vogue for anthropology and sociology finds paperback readers situating themselves in relation to culture and society, not in order to conform (the worst fear of postwar critics of mass culture) but in order to understand and cope with the pressures bearing on them. In this, they were exercising the qualities that the two best-selling contemporary social scientists were recommending to them. Both Ruth Benedict, in *Patterns of Culture*, and David Riesman, in *The Lonely Crowd*, sought to raise awareness of the social and cultural patterns within which people lived, so that they might gain more control – what Riesman called 'autonomy' – over their individual life-courses. As another bestselling social scientist, C. Wright Mills, put it in *The Sociological Imagination* in 1959, people needed to embed their 'personal troubles' within 'the public issues of social structure', without which they couldn't begin to formulate principles of action that were rational from the point of view of the society in which they lived.<sup>107</sup> Much the same function could be attributed to the history and literature on the Pelican list, which as Wolf Lepenies

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<sup>105</sup> [Umberto Eco], 'The Heavy Industry of Writing', *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 Sep. 1965, 843. For a statement of Penguin's own continued openness to surprising reader demand in the 1960s, see 'Leisure is Big Business', *Sunday Times Colour Supplement*, Sep. 1962, cutting in Penguin Archive, DM1294/3/4.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford, 2012), notably 88, on science fiction's own uses of expertise combined with imagination.

<sup>107</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 1st pub. 1959 (New York, 2000), 8-11, 128-31, 168-9. Mills was a great enthusiast for the paperback revolution, and appeared in both Mentor and Pelican.

has argued worked as a ‘concealed sociology’ in British culture – in some respects ‘better sociology than sociology’ in their ability to place individual sensibilities in social and cultural context.<sup>108</sup>

These are indeed ‘technologies of the self’, but they are much more diverse, fluid and reflexive than the idea of governmentality implies, hardly traceable to ‘the rationales and techniques of power’, and very often explicitly counterposed to those ‘rationales and techniques’, forged and employed in private spaces, drawing on expertise but employing it in ways unknowable and unpredictable to expertise, and, I would argue, with long-term public consequences as well. They chime with a ‘mid-century moment’ recognized in the literatures on both Britain and America in which affluence and education – earlier in America than in Britain – and existential searching and widening horizons triggered by world war – more immediately in Britain than in America – spread to mass audiences and were catered to by an anti-fascist and democratic ethos in key sections of the intellectual and cultural elite, including the progressives and adult educators in the saddle at Penguin and NAL.<sup>109</sup> Certainly, as is now beginning to be recognized, the ‘paperback revolution’ opened up new ideas and ideals to new audiences that made possible their overt articulation in the more oppositional movements of the 1960s, even though those movements were themselves inclined (often borrowing from the Frankfurt School) to condescend to the paperback readers along with everyone else.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Wolf Lepenies, ‘Concealed Sociology: English Literary Criticism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, in *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* (Cambridge, 1988), 155-95, esp. 183. This view was held explicitly by the adult-education movement.

<sup>109</sup> Alongside a now conventional literature which posits a mid-century crisis, during which experts sought to shore up democracy, one can place an emergent literature stressing these mid-century opportunities which in many ways laid a foundation for the more overt political and cultural changes of the 1960s and 70s: see e.g., Susan Hegeman, *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (Princeton, 1999); Hedstrom, *Rise of Liberal Religion*; Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago, 2013); Petigny, *Permissive Society*; Saler, *As If*; Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2006); James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford, 2010).

<sup>110</sup> e.g. Hedstrom, *Rise of Liberal Religion*, 221-4; Mercer, ‘Paperback Revolution’, 619-27, 635; Imelda Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City* (Basingstoke, 2005);

Furthermore, as this article has argued, the circulation of paperbacks also offered up unusual opportunities for readers' responses to close the feedback loop and reshape, or co-produce, the knowledge purveyed through this medium. Publishers in this area specifically proved sensitive barometers of readers' interests and preferences and altered their lists, instructed their authors, and edited their copy accordingly. It was not only that they provided more of what they thought readers wanted, but they worked closely with authors to provide the right kind of texts by recruiting, commissioning, editing drafts and repackaging. Of course, this kind of feedback between production and consumption is what markets are supposed to do all the time. But not all markets do that, and how or whether they do that is, in the case of cultural production, not always easy to discern. As Fred Turner has noted, the 'free' market for cultural products created by liberal democracies in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century – what he calls the 'democratic surround' – was not always as transparently free and democratic as it appeared:

the surround clearly represented the rise of a managerial mode of control: a mode in which people might be free to choose their experiences, but only from a menu written by experts.<sup>111</sup>

That generalization applies to some extent to the markets discussed in this article, but I have tried to show also the ways in which the menu was not just written by experts, but rewritten by readers, and furthermore in ways which altered the form and content of the dishes as well.

## V

It is easy enough to date the beginnings of the paperback revolution – with Penguin in the 1930s and its American comparators after 1939, reaching some kind of climax around 1960, when the term 'paperback revolution' is coined. But when (if ever) did it end?

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Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson, Miss., 2004), esp. 22-4, though postdating the paperback revolution to the early 1960s.

<sup>111</sup> Turner's main point is that even this 'cafeteria' approach was a more democratic riposte to authoritarian modes of propaganda, without the further element of co-production to which I point here. Turner, *Democratic Surround*, 5-6, 74.



Contemporaries pronounced its end by the late 1960s.<sup>112</sup> By that time, the paperback had displaced the hardcover, accounting for the majority of sales, and total book sales had plateaued. This stalled market was disguised for some time by a continued upscaling of the paperback, as it moved off the newsstands and into the bookshops, and away from the mass-market towards the egghead market, leading to growth in money but not in unit sales.<sup>113</sup> Already at this point the corporatization of publishing was underway. Weybright sold New American Library to Times-Mirror in 1961. After Lane's death in 1970 – literally, the day after Lane's death – Penguin was absorbed into Pearson Longman. In the 1970s, corporate owners seeking enhanced profits began to abandon their backlists and focus on a smaller number of bestselling titles. Boutique publishers – including academic presses – moved in to take on the shorter print-runs and indeed the number of titles in print mushroomed up, in the phenomenon identified by the internet guru Chris Anderson as a bifurcation between a small body of mass-market products and a 'long tail' of niche market products. The intermediate position occupied by our Pelicans and Mentors is squeezed out. Something similar was happening to retailing, at least in the United States. Bookshops finally sprouted up in every suburban mall in the country, mostly also in corporate ownership (in the form of chains such as Walden, Pickwick, B. Dalton and Barnes & Noble), selling predominantly bestsellers. The same period of the 1960s and '70s was also the heyday of the independent bookshop in the United States, but a larger number of shops were dividing up a smaller share of the market. The 'long tail' was now selling to a diverse but highly fragmented and precarious market in 10,000 independent stores.<sup>114</sup> In Britain, Penguin was able to ride this wave only by

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<sup>112</sup> [Charles Clark], 'Paperback to Front', *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 May 1965, 425; 'The Ten-Year Plateau', *New York Times Book Review*, 16 Feb. 1969, BR1. Clark was a Penguin editor, still operating here under cover of anonymity.

<sup>113</sup> 'The Ten-Year Plateau', *New York Times Book Review*, 16 Feb. 1969, BR1; Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 333, 374-7.

<sup>114</sup> Coser et al., *Books*, 25-31, 44-5, 57, 212, 336-7, 349; Miller, 'Selling the Product', 94-6, 99, 102; Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 374-86; Epstein, *Book Business*, 104-8; Ray Walters, 'From Boom to Crunch', *New York Times Book Review*, 17 Jul. 1983, BR12; Edwin McDowell, 'Turmoil in the Racks: The Second Paperback Revolution', *New York Times Book Review*, 29 Sep. 1985, BR35, 52.

diversifying its lines, going for the racy bestsellers that Lane would have abjured while retaining a share of the ‘long tail’. In this adjustment non-fiction was put on the backburner, and in 1984 the Pelican imprint was discontinued.<sup>115</sup>

It is easy to fall prey to ‘declinism’ in observing this transformation of the book market, and thus to duplicate the earlier declinism that Hoggart and others applied inappropriately to the 1950s and ‘60s. As leisure and affluence continued to grow in both countries, book sales resumed their upward movement towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and we can all name serious non-fiction paperback bestsellers from recent decades – Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time*, Daniel Kahneman’s *Thinking Fast and Slow*. It has been predicted that Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century* will rival Hawking’s sales.<sup>116</sup> Book sales are in decline in both unit and money terms, but of course non-fiction material is now accessible through all sorts of alternative digital media. Still, something more fundamental has changed in the culture as well that justifies us in closing this particular paperback revolution in the 1970s. There has been no let-up – surely rather an intensification – in the care of the self. But that cultivation has been focused ever more narrowly on the kind of inspirational ‘self help’ that Mentor and Pelican had scorned, and, more broadly, on consumer and leisure pursuits. It has become more individuated, more ‘lifestyle’ oriented, less philosophical and disembedded from society. Most clearly, it has distanced itself from expertise, reflecting a well-known decline in ‘trust in experts’ that is not a recent phenomenon but one that can be traced back to the political cleavages of the late 1960s and early 1970s.. If this might appear

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<sup>115</sup> Peter Mayer, ‘Penguin Books in the Long 1970s: A Company, Not a Sacred Institution’, in Black, Pemberton and Thane (eds.), *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, 221-2. In Britain, the number of independent bookshops seems to have remained stable, with suburbs now poorly served, but with more bookshop chains and, unlike the U.S., growing newsagent sales: Norrie, *Mumby’s Publishing*, 193-5, 199-204, 211; Arthur Young and London Economics for the Booksellers’ Association, *Book Retailing in the 1990s* (London, 1987), 57-60; *Cultural Trends*, xxix (1998). Penguin was still relying more heavily on bookshops, though no longer as heavily as in the 1950s. Alan Wherry to Linda Lloyd Jones, ‘Facts About Penguin’, 15 Jan. 1985: Penguin Archive, DM1294/4/2/10. The Pelican imprint has recently been revived, though as yet on a still modest scale.

<sup>116</sup> Robert H. Wade, ‘The Piketty Phenomenon: Why Has *Capital* Become a Publishing Sensation?’, *International Affairs* 90 (2014), 1069, though note that the Hawking comparison is based on sales at (the atypical, to say the least) Economists’ Bookshop at the LSE. Thanks to Duncan Bell for this reference.

to have freed us from ‘governmentality’, it has also deprived us of intellectual tools that for some decades millions of people found helpful in understanding themselves and the world around them. At the very least, we can conclude that the ‘co-production’ of knowledge for self-culture is not, as is sometimes asserted, an innovation of a later, postmodern, digital period, but that if we look more closely at the circumstances in which knowledge was created earlier, in the mid-twentieth century, we can find plentiful evidence in the mediation of paperback entrepreneurs between experts and readers of ‘co-production’ there too.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Michael Gibbons, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzman, Peter Scott and Martin Trow, *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Society* (London, 1994); Helga Nowotny, Peter Scott and Michael Gibbons, *Re-Thinking Science: Knowledge and the Public in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge, 2001).